

/16 cont./

342 Another kind of phatskha, in the form of an irregular rectangular, is constructed as follows. Two chestnut poles are driven into the ground at the front door in such a way that the upper ends touch each other. The Abkhaz call them amakratl-khkva (scissors). On the side opposite the "scissors" another pole is driven in; a beam is laid on top of the "scissors" and this pole, and the roof rests on it. The roof of such a phatskha can be flat or sloping. Such a phatskha can be built in any size. A passage is made in front of it, and in the back there is a special compartment for storing all kinds of utensils and for keeping the cattle in winter. The walls of the phatskha are not covered; only in winter are they now and then covered with ferns. Therefore the walls are easily penetrated by light, and at the same time by cold and rain.

354 Inside the house, in the middle of the phatskha, is the
 • [252] hearth (akhushtaara), made of clay or hewn stone. Above the
 [415] hearth cast-iron kettles are suspended from the ceiling on hoops; in these the food is cooked. The Abkhaz try to maintain a permanent fire in the hearth. The smoke escapes through the roof, but on windy days it remains circling inside the room; therefore the phatskha, and especially the upper part of it, is covered with soot. On one side of the phatskha there is a couch; near the hearth stands a long and fairly wide bench, which sometimes also serves as a couch. The bedding is arranged on the couch; nearby stands a trunk, where all the necessary articles are kept. On the wall hang a saddle, a whip, and some of the /17/ weapons. In a corner, close to the wall, are the utensils for preparing ghomi; in this same corner are baskets for provisions, wooden or horn spoons and cups hang on the wall, while milk-pails and troughs, etc. stand on the floor. Basins and pitchers are rarely found; instead of a pitcher, a gourd is used. A few implements must be added to all this: a flat stone used as a mortar, and a whetstone. And that is the whole domestic inventory of the Abkhaz of average means.

342 The large quadrangular phatskha serves as the main family
 585 dwelling, while the conical one (khkvatsu) serves as a lodging for

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which is *Khetsia*.¹ He has one sister from whom descends the demon family; that is why *antsw* has no right to destroy once for all the demons, his blood relations.

The Abkhasians appear to have made their gods after the image of man; one and the same god can be both good and evil in relation to a given person, according to the zeal with which he fulfils his duties towards him. The only means by which an angered god can be placated is by open-hearted confession and sacrificial offerings. And as the Abkhasians have a great number of gods their whole life is passed in continuous prayer and offering to gods.

I. AYT'AR-NŌHWA*

I. *Jabrdn*

The Abkhasians make preparations for Shrovetide with particular solemnity, for its approach coincides with the observance of a series of religious rites and offerings, known under the general name of *Ayt'ar-nŏhwa*. *Ayt'ar* is a great god of procreation and fertility, particularly with regard to the breeding of cattle. He is, as we shall see presently, the head of a whole pleiade of gods, who appear to be subordinate to him, and each of whom constitutes a part of him. *Nŏhwa*, which is derived from *a-nŏhvara*, to pray, denotes praying, prayer, whence *Ayt'ar-nŏhwa*, meaning prayer, offering, to *Ayt'ar*.

The first in order of offerings is that performed in honour of the god *jabrdn*, i.e. god of the goats (and sheep) (see above, p. 120).

On the Sunday, the last day of Shrovetide, the eldest woman of the family leavens dough from the flour of *ashŏ* (Georgian *shoria*, oat)* and places it in a warm corner. The dough is often kneaded with a stick, called *adswŏ*,† made specially for this purpose from the hazel tree, on account of which the dough itself is called *adswarasa*, a combination of *adswŏ*, a stick with a tapering end, and *arsara*, to knead.

On the Shrove Thursday the eldest woman of the family—*ap'hwəs-tsk'ya* ("woman pure")—takes a portion of this leaven, kneads it with the stick, adds some water and flour, boils it, and then bakes maizebread—*amgyal*. This maizebread must be baked on a hearth.

* For the pronunciation of "h" see p. 119, n. *. The combination "hw" represents a labialized variety of "h". [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

† The combination "dsw" which is to be pronounced with one breath impulse, represents a labialized variety of "ds". For this latter sound see p. 329 (s'). [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

¹ N. Y. Marr, *On the Religious Beliefs of the Abkhasians* (in Russian), in *Khristianski Vostok*, "The Christian East," St. Pb., 1916, vol. iv, issue 1, p. 138.

(A translation of this work is given in this number, pp. 167-180, see p. 171. Ed. Georgia.)

It should be noted that in all these sacrificial offerings oat flour and, on rare occasions, millet flour, is used. Without this flour or unless it is at least used as an ingredient the offering becomes inadmissible. The reason for this is probably because *ashŏ* (and *ghowŏ*, millet) alone constituted the staple food.

196 When the woman places the dough on the hearth, she holds over it a
 [269] pure *sulguni* (a round of cheese),¹ from the centre of which she cuts
 out a small round piece and places it in the middle of the maizebread;
 with the exception of this middle part, the maizebread is lenten.
 When placing the dough on the hearth, she scatters bits of it, first
 in the direction of the sea, and then towards the mountains; and, as
 if calling to the goats, she says, *reyt, reyt* (the goat call), and mutters
 [539] the following prayer: "Thou, *jabrán*, the great part of the great
 god (*Ayt'ar intswakhwedù jabrán*)! Grant us the warmth of thine
 eyes and of thy heart. Be the guardian of our herds! Bear goodwill
 unto us so that no harm should befall our herds, except their old
 moulted wool and old dung!" Apart from this introduction, which
 is always used, each says an improvised prayer. After this is over,
 as if calling to the goats they again exclaim, *reyt, reyt*, turning alterna-
 tively towards the sea and the mountains.

When the maizebread is baked, and the goats have returned from
 the fields, the eldest man in the family prays to god *jabrán*, muttering
 approximately the formula quoted above. The whole family joins
 him in uttering *dāmen*, and the candles are lighted.

It is to be noted that during the prayer the participants also invoke
 the "god" *mkyamgaria*,* and say: "May thy bounty never fall short
 [197] on us." It seems to me that this deity is no other than the "Megre-
 [196] lianized" angels Michael and Gabriel (Geo. *Mik'el da Gabrieli*), with
 whom Christianity endeavoured, in vain, to replace *Ayt'ar* and his
 "parts" of gods; up to this day the pagan deities still take precedence,
 although they also pray to *mkyamgaria*.

The maizebread is first cut into four parts with two strokes of
 [221] the knife, and only afterwards into small pieces; the neighbours
 [220] are not forgotten either, a piece being sent to each. The maizebread
 is baked in rhododendron (*d-k'wazhwe*)† leaves.

2. *Zhwabrán* (god of cows)*

[196] This rite is performed in the same manner as *jabrán*. The prayer
 begins thus: "Thou *zhwabrán*, the great part (of the great deity)

104 * The palatal or mid-lingual semi-vowel "y" in "k'y", "gy", as also in "ky",
 "wy", "shy", "gy", etc., met with in this article, lingualizes or lotises the
 preceding consonant sound, the combinations "k'y", "gy", etc., representing lin-
 gualized or lotized varieties of "k", "g" (pronounced hard, as in "go"), etc. For
 the pronunciation of simple radical sounds see p. 328. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

† See p. 131, note *.

1 In Abkhazian *atshyashwe*, pure cheese; cf. Megrelian (I. Kipshidze, *The Megreli-
 Russian Dictionary*, s.v. *an'ari*) *ish'obes*, which is also an Abkhazian expression, denoting
 "pure (a-*ish'ya*), good (d-*bes*)".

2 In Guria this observance is known under the name of *besoba* (an abstract form
 of *bessh*, cowhouse) or *iloroba*; the latter probably has some connection with St. George
 [191] of Ikon. The Gurians often call a cow *ilora*. In Megrelia the god of cattle-breeding is
 known as *Zhimi-An'ar*.

776 guardians, whose power extends to his descendants, but not to those
 of his brothers or sisters. In the village of Adzvibzha almost everyone
 796 is obliged to carry out this "praying to God". Christians as well as
 Muhammadans.

[778] Every Abkhaz keeps in his cellar, in honour of "God", a special
 pitcher filled with must of the very best grade. However great his
 need, an Abkhaz will not, for any consideration in the world, open
 this "sacrificial" pitcher until the celebration of the cult of "praying
 to God".¹ Early in the morning, on returning from the church, the
 [782] head of the family surrounded by the male members of his household,
 sacrifices a young he-goat over the "sacrificial" pitcher, and entreats
 "the great God to receive graciously the humble offering made by
 him in accordance with the instructions of his forefathers . . ." He
 humbly entreats the Great God "punish us not for our faults and
 trespasses", etc. After this the meat of the immolated goat is boiled,
 [852] and sacrificial wheat-cakes are baked. All this is taken down into the
 cellar, and placed in front of the sacrificial pitcher. The members
 of the family kneel down, while the head of the family reverently
 cleans and opens the pitcher, and, holding in his left hand a hazel
 stick upon which the heart and liver of the goat are transfixed, he
 prays *Anhsa-du* (to great God) that He grant him and his family
 a long and happy life. In his prayer he never fails to mention that they
 are performing the rite "in the manner they were taught by their
 fathers and grandfathers". Afterwards he fills a glass with wine from
 the pitcher and pours it on the heart and liver and the sacrificial
 cakes; he then passes the latter, with the wine, three times over the
 heads of the supplicants who are kneeling down, and says: "Grant
 us the warmth of Thine eyes and of Thine heart! Protect us from all
 infirmities and sickness." Then follows again the libation of wine
 Now they all rise, turn round from right to left, and each places a
 piece of frankincense on burning coals. For a few minutes they all
 stand still humbly, while the great God "receives" their offerings,
 and then, with strict observation of order of seniority, a glass of wine
 and a small piece of the heart and liver is given to each of the partici-
 pants. It should be noted that only the household members are
 allowed to partake of these sacrificial offerings. Even the married
 daughters of the family are treated as strangers, and they are not
 allowed to share in the offerings with their husbands and children.
 It is sinful even to think of the sale of the wine. In most of the families
 [852] the female sex is generally forbidden to partake of this offering.

Thus do the Abkhazians perform annually the domestic offering
 to God of "His share". But every three to five years each Abkhaz

¹ The same applies to other "sacrificial pitchers" referred to below.